

Eleanor Schwartz

Pathbreaking Attorney, Women's Rights Advocate



Eleanor Schwartz, an attorney in the Bureau of Land Management who helped to craft the bill that fundamentally changed the way U.S. public lands are managed, was a pioneering professional with a wry sense of humor and a passion for women's rights and equal opportunity. Known for her commitment and conscientious attitude, she continued to work until her death in December 2000 at age 88.

Former and current BLM employees recalled and celebrated her life and contributions, noting that this year marks the 40th anniversary of the passage of the landmark [Federal Land Policy and Management Act](#) that she helped to craft.

Schwartz, who joined Interior in 1962, led the BLM's Office of Legislative and Regulatory Management for many years, including the period in which the Federal Land Policy and Management Act was conceived, drafted, and

passed. She played an important role in shaping the bill, assisting legislators on the technical and legal aspects of the act.

Barry Crowell, an attorney with the Office of the Solicitor and Eleanor's co-worker for many years, remembered speaking to her often about the extensive work involved in drafting and redrafting the bill as the legislative process dragged on over several years.

"She spent numerous hours on the Hill working with members and their staffs to arrive at what is today's BLM organic act," Crowell said. Her knowledge and understanding of the process was so extensive that in 1979 the Arizona Law Review published Schwartz' article on the history and passage of the act, [A Capsule Examination of the Legislative History of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976](#).

Over the years, Schwartz was characterized as fiercely loyal to the BLM, tenacious, very bright, and articulate. Others recognized her as a woman with a keen sense of humor and a high regard for people who were hard working and willing to do what was needed on the job.

"To people who knew her well, I think she showed them what a real dedicated federal employee was," said Earl Holmes, a BLM legislative assistant who worked for Eleanor for nine years. "She got the job done without making excuses, when she had every right to make them. She did not look for excuses; she found a solution and finished the work."

Crowell said many people described her as "old school." This was a result of her unbending belief that government should get the maximum return from its employees—a characteristic that didn't always sit well with some employees. However, the Division of Legislative and Regulatory Management under her leadership was viewed as one of the most responsive, timely, and technically competent offices in the Department.

Queen Sledge, a BLM staff assistant, recalled that Schwartz also had another side. "She could be a mother, grandmother, or whatever you needed her to be at any given time," Sledge said.

At first glance, Schwartz's devotion to an agency concerned primarily with the public lands of the historic Wild West may seem inconsistent with her Brooklyn, New York, background. But she was as much a pioneer as any who have braved a new frontier.

After graduating from Hunter College in New York, where she was inducted into the Hunter College Hall of Fame because of her work on the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and New York University Law School, she set out to make her way in the working world.

"I had the great fortune of working for Eleanor from 1988 - 1992. Both as a mentor and educator, she possessed a wealth of knowledge regarding the Bureau of Land Management's mission. She was one of the lead authors and contributors to the passage of FLPMA. As I reflect back on my working experience with Eleanor, I learned a great deal from her about the foundations of the BLM and its new direction under FLPMA. All BLMers can take great pride in the great legacy that Eleanor pioneered for the agency."

BLM- Mike Pool (California State Director 2000-2012 and acting BLM Director 2012-2013)

One of Schwartz's favorite stories involved her attempts to find employment as a lawyer in New York City after her graduation from law school in the 1930s, Crowell recalled.

"Eleanor related how she went into the office of a somewhat pompous partner in a law firm for an employment interview," Crowell said. "After a cursory discussion regarding her credentials and background, the man looked at her, lit his cigar, leaned back, and put his feet up on the desk. He told her she could never be hired at his firm, because she wore dresses and would never be able to put her feet on the desk like the other male lawyers who worked there."

Schwartz used to laugh and say after that kind of treatment, working with the BLM "good old boy" network in the bureau's early years "was a piece of cake."

A sign she kept on her desk summed up her approach and her wry humor regarding such obstacles. It read, "To get ahead, a woman has to work twice as hard as a man. Fortunately, it is not difficult." Her work ethic and ability to assimilate into what was a male-dominated agency paid off when she became the first woman GS-15 in BLM history.

Former BLM Director Pat Shea said Schwartz was "a person who challenged the system as a pioneer woman, yet remembered with fondness those that had, at times, blocked her way."

Throughout her tenure at the Department, she remained active in the field of Equal Employment Opportunity, serving as the Federal Women's Coordinator for the BLM. She was honored twice

with Interior's highest commendation, the Distinguished Service Award, which recognized, among other accomplishments, her work on the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

In addition, Eleanor was active in the Northern Virginia's Jewish community. She was not only was a board member and chair of the trustees of her synagogue's endowment fund for numerous years, but also a member of the religious school committee. She was a past director of Mercaz (a Jewish service organization), the Conservative Zionist Organization, and chair of the Northern Virginia Jewish Coalition. She was also a member of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists, Jewish World Congress, NOW, and a life member of Hadassah. Schwartz is survived by her twin daughters, two sisters, and four grandchildren.

"Without a doubt," Crowell said, "I think Eleanor's role in the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act was her greatest accomplishment. In her passing, the BLM not only lost a devoted worker, but also an institutional memory that can't be replaced."

AWARDS IN THE WASHINGTON OFFICE



**Eleanor Schwartz and Director
Gregg.**

Photo taken between 1978-1981

<http://www.blm.gov/flpma/eleanor.htm>

http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/info/newsbytes/2008/354-xtra_e_schwartz.html